

JANUARY 2019

How your generosity is supporting people of Auckland and Northland

Newscan

A life saved
thanks to
you'

Pancreatic
cancer –
check to
protect

PLUS

A special thank you
Your cancer questions answered
Vigilant GP uncovers cancer



**Cancer
Society**

Te Kāhui Matepukupuku
o Aotearoa

Stop cancer before it starts

Around 8,000 Kiwis are diagnosed with potentially preventable cancer every year - that's more than the entire population of Kerikeri. Three of the biggest risk factors are tobacco, obesity, and alcohol.

These "big three" contribute to a range of different cancers, including some of the most common in New Zealand: lung, breast and bowel cancer.

Many of us know about the dangers of tobacco and exposure

to the sun, but it may come as a surprise to learn that obesity and alcohol are also significant risk factors for cancer.

Cancer Society Auckland Northland is stepping up its work in these areas and recently hosted Cancer Research Week with a focus on cancer prevention.

The keynote event, *Stop Cancer Before it Starts*, featured renowned experts who presented policies already in place overseas that are

reducing the harm caused by tobacco, alcohol and obesity. Sadly, New Zealand has fallen behind in many of these areas.

Cancer Society recognises bold action is needed and plans are well underway to advocate for improved policies to improve the lives of all New Zealanders.

We hope to update you over the coming months with progress in these critical areas.

Cancer care at a crossroads

Recently I met someone with bowel cancer. She'd had symptoms for over a year and had been told she was constipated and her bleeding was due to haemorrhoids. Eventually she was referred for a colonoscopy which was declined, and then her bowel became blocked. By that time her cancer was incurable.

At first glance you might think it's a one off. But I see people in the same situation every day and it speaks to a bigger problem of leadership and a willingness to solve some tough problems.

We need strong government-led policy to help people get early diagnosis, screening for all ages, world-class access to cancer drugs, and policies on obesity, alcohol, smoking, and exercise that reduce the risks for cancer in our communities.

Our government policies are largely getting weaker on cancer, not stronger.

That's why Cancer Society has pushed big issues like PHARMAC, waiting times and our outcomes compared to Australia.

It's why we are holding the "Cancer Care at a Crossroads" conference this month - to demand that all the decision-makers, academics, NGOs and other leaders come together to devise a strategy that will meet the demands we face in the next 15 years. We need a solution that's longer than one electoral cycle.

Cancer is New Zealand's number one killer and the number of people affected will increase by 50% in the next 15 years. We must come together, commit to change, and act for the future. If we don't,



Cancer Society Medical Director
Dr Chris Jackson

our failure will define us, and we will continue to tell stories of a system that fails its people.

Thanks from Kaye

Thank you so much to everyone who donated so generously to the Christmas appeal. I was so humbled and overwhelmed with your lovely comments and generosity.

As a Cancer Society nurse, my job can sometimes be tough but knowing so many people support and value the work we do gives me a real boost.

It's my privilege to be able to meet cancer patients every day. Because of your support, I'm able to hear their stories and make sure they get the care they need to get through cancer. I let them know about all the services that are available during their stay and make sure they feel comfortable and supported.

Because I'm based at Domain Lodge, I'm available for patients during their stay and I make sure they have my contact details so they can get in touch when they need me.

Some patients' stories really stay with me. Jackie's story is one of those - you may remember her from my letter.

She had a rough time when she was diagnosed with bowel cancer. Being able to support her throughout her treatment and seeing her leave Domain Lodge when she had recovered was so special. It's people like Jackie who remind me why I'm a nurse.

I love making a difference in the lives of cancer patients and their families. It's only because of your donations I'm able to do this. Thank you so much.

With very best wishes,

Kaye



I often meet cancer patients in the library at Domain Lodge



6 weeks the average stay at Domain Lodge

700 families stayed at Domain Lodge over the holiday season



What is Domain Lodge:



Domain Lodge is a purpose-built accommodation, offering 'home away from home' accommodation for people who need to travel long distances for treatment in Auckland. Services include:

- Cancer support nurse specialists in house
- On-site psychology services including one-on-one and group support as well as group talks
- A specialised library offers a up to date and reliable information about cancer
- Domain Lodge staff and volunteers to help answer any questions big or small

Vigilant GP uncovers cancer

Sometimes cancer can come completely out of the blue.

Nyree was feeling well but because she was registering with a new GP she was sent for some routine blood tests, as she explains:

“I am usually pretty healthy, so I wasn’t worried about the tests, but then my GP rang and said my liver function was abnormal.”

Nyree was sent for an ultrasound, but nothing was picked up on the scan. As a precaution, Nyree’s GP sent her for an MRI:

“I was walking back to work after the MRI when I got the call. The specialist said there was a growth in my pancreas. I was sent for a biopsy and they confirmed it was cancer. It was a shock, but I am so grateful my GP pushed for all those tests, I wouldn’t have known without her.”

Things started to move quickly so Nyree didn’t have much time to think about her diagnosis:

“A friend of mine had passed away with pancreatic cancer so I knew it was bad, but I didn’t Google anything or have time to read anything. I was on autopilot.”

Nyree needed urgent surgery to remove the cancer. However, during the operation her surgeon found the tumour was surrounding an artery so couldn’t be safely removed - she would need chemotherapy to reduce its size enough to operate:



Nyree was so grateful for Tanja’s support

“That was really hard to hear. I had three months of chemotherapy and the tumour only shrunk a little bit. But the surgeon thought it was small enough to try to operate again.”

Thankfully, her surgeon was able to successfully remove the tumour together with most of her pancreas - but further tests found the cancer had spread to Nyree’s lymph nodes.

Nyree needed three more months of chemotherapy. It wasn’t until this second round of treatment that she found out about the support available from Cancer Society.

“I felt like I didn’t have to do it on my own anymore,”

Tanja, a cancer support nurse specialist, got in touch and let Nyree know how she could help:

“Once I met Tanja, I knew I could ring her with any problem. I felt like I didn’t have to do it on my own anymore. She was gentle and caring and listened carefully to everything I had to say.”

Tanja could see Nyree needed extra support and referred her to a Cancer Society psychologist, as Nyree explains:

“I met with Sarah, one of Cancer Society’s psychologists every fortnight. It was strange, but when I found out I was cancer-free as well as feeling relieved, I also experienced ‘survivor’s guilt’ but we worked on it together.”

Looking back, Nyree wishes she had known about Cancer Society earlier:

“I had no idea what to expect when I started treatment. It would’ve been so much easier to have Tanja there from the beginning.”

It’s only through your donations that thousands of people like Nyree can get the support they need to get through cancer. You really are making a difference when you make a donation to Cancer Society – thank you!

If you, or someone you know, is struggling to cope with cancer, call us or visit our website for more information and support.

 **cancernz.org.nz**

 **0800 CANCER (226 237)**



Early-stage pancreatic cancer rarely causes symptoms.

Pancreatic cancer is difficult to detect early so symptoms often only appear once the cancer has spread or is large enough to affect nearby organs.

You should see your doctor if you notice:

- jaundice
- indigestion
- appetite loss
- nausea
- unexplained weight loss
- pain in the upper abdomen, side or back, which may cause you to wake up at night
- changed bowel motions – including diarrhoea or severe constipation

While these symptoms may not be caused by cancer, it’s important to talk to your doctor if you have any concerns.

CAN YOU HELP?

It breaks our heart when we hear about someone who has been struggling through their cancer and who was not aware of how Cancer Society could help.

We need to get the word out about our services – and we need your help.

Please let your friends, neighbours, colleagues and loved ones know about Cancer Society and all the help we can provide.

Whether it’s transport to medical appointments, accommodation for those living far away from hospital or support from our specialist nurses and psychologists, Cancer Society is here for anyone affected by any kind of cancer.

You can get in touch by calling 0800 CANCER (226 237) or visit www.cancernz.org.nz.

A life saved thanks to you

Luma had been struggling with her health but it wasn't until she fainted and ended up hospital that tests uncovered an underlying problem. As she explains:

"The day after I was admitted, they told me I had bowel cancer. I was so scared and I felt so alone. What was I going to do? I discharged myself after I was told and went home to hug my children. It was heart-wrenching"

“Everything was a blur but Robin helped me to make sense of it all”

Luma urgently needed support. Thankfully, the hospital referred her to Cancer Society and Robin, a cancer support nurse specialist got in touch.



"As soon as Robin came into my life, I had the support I needed. She was there from the beginning - answering my questions about chemotherapy, reassuring me about my surgeries and making sure my family was supported too."

With a family to look after and feeling so unwell, Luma needed extra help:

"Robin took the time to get to know me. She called me to check how I was feeling after treatment. Whether it was good or bad news, Robin was always there."

Robin regularly called and visited Luma at home - helping with meals for Luma's family, giving advice on side-effect management and just being a supportive ear.

One day when Robin called to check in, Luma mentioned she'd been bleeding:

"Robin told me I needed to see a doctor straight away and even though I didn't want to go, she kept telling me how important it was. I'm so lucky Robin realised something was wrong. I could've died if I'd left it much longer. My haemoglobin levels were dangerously low. Robin saved my life."

With Robin's support, Luma was able to get through treatment. She is now recovering and starting to get back on with her life.

"Now I'm cancer-free, I said to Robin 'I don't know if I can let you go!' I can't thank Cancer Society enough for the support I got for me and my family."



It's your generosity that ensured Luma received the support she needed to get through cancer. What you give is truly life-changing - thank you.



Your cancer questions answered by Registered Nurse and Manager of Supportive Care Michelle Gundersen-Reid

Q I went for a biopsy the other day and I'm finding it really hard waiting for the results. What can I do to help cope with waiting?

Waiting for your cancer test results, appointments or treatments can be overwhelming.

Reminding yourself about why you have to wait can be reassuring. Set aside a limited time to worry, for example, 15 minutes. Write down your concerns and make a list of questions. When the time is up, stop and find something else to do.

It's a good idea to ask for a contact number to call if you haven't heard anything in the expected time. This can help if you're worrying about being "lost in the system".

Write down what you are worried about, work out the things you can do something about and try to accept the things you cannot change.

Q My workmate has recently been diagnosed with cancer. What can I do to support them at work?

It's important to check what your workmate is comfortable with. They may not want to talk about their cancer at all. Some people prefer never to talk about their personal lives at work while others will appreciate the opportunity.

Keep your conversations confidential. Assume you can't talk to others about what your workmate has shared with you unless they give specific permission.

Ask your workmate if they would like one person to update others on how things are going. This avoids the person being over-loaded by questions from well-meaning colleagues.

You'll find more information on our website www.cancernz.org.nz about how to manage cancer in the workplace

For more answers, support or just a chat, get in touch or visit our website.

cancernz.org.nz
0800 CANCER (226 237)

The new year often brings with it reflection on past events and a resolution to take steps to improve our health. Below, you'll find some signs and symptoms of the most common cancers in New Zealand which we hope you'll find useful.

Melanoma

The first sign of a melanoma is usually the appearance of a new spot or a change in size, shape and/or colour of an existing freckle or mole. The change is normally noticed over several weeks or months rather than days. It's quite normal to have spots and moles on our skin, but it's important to recognise any changes, including:

- unevenness or lop-sidedness
- border irregularity
- colour variation
- enlarging or changing

Breast

Breasts undergo changes throughout a woman's life, particularly the normal changes experienced during the menstrual cycle.

Get to know what your breasts look and feel like normally, so you can see or feel any changes that are unusual for you. Some breast changes may be early signs of breast cancer, including:

- a lump, lumpiness or thickening of tissue
- nipple changes or a change in breast shape
- a painful area
- skin dimpling or a rash/red marks appearing on one breast

Many cancers, when detected early, can be successfully treated.

Prostate

In men over 50, the prostate gland often gets larger due to a non-cancerous condition called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

Men with early prostate cancer are unlikely to have any symptoms, as these only occur when the cancer is larger.

Whilst most of the following symptoms are caused by BPH, a few may also be caused by cancer:

- difficulty passing urine
- passing urine more frequently than usual
- pain when passing urine
- blood in the urine (this is not common)

Bowel

It's important to know what's normal for you so you can spot any changes. If you notice any of these symptoms and they last longer than four to six weeks, tell your doctor:

- Bleeding from your bottom or blood in your bowel motion
- A recent change in your bowel motions: going to the toilet more often, diarrhoea, constipation or a feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
- Stomach pains, frequent wind pains, bloating or cramps

These symptoms may not be caused by cancer, but it's important to talk to your doctor if you have any concerns.

Cancer Society Auckland Northland

Contact Auckland

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Contact Northland

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www.cancernz.org.nz